



# *Make Family Health History a Tradition*

## **“Turkey Talk” health discussion**



If you have time – and think your family members would be open to a short talk – think about having a “Turkey Talk” health discussion. This outline will help you tell your family members why a family health history is important, how to collect one, and what to do with it.

Here’s how the “Turkey Talk” works. Talking points are boxed in green and will explain what a family health history is all about. Feel free to use your own words so your family members feel comfortable. You don’t need to be an expert to talk about family health history. The “Turkey Talk” outlines what to say. Get everyone to join in the fun but be mindful of family members who may not want to talk about their family health history.

### **1. Introduce the “Turkey Talk”**

I want to talk about the health problems in our family. I feel this is important because I have learned that health problems, such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, can run in families. Having a family history of these may increase your risk of getting them. I want us all to have many more holidays together, so I want to share this with you:

Why should we know our family health history?

- Because having a family history of a health problem is common – almost everyone has a family history of something.
- Because it is very likely that some of us are at risk. Some of us may know it, and others may not.
- Because collecting a family health history can be fun.
- And because there’s good news – knowing your family health history can save your life. I want to make sure we all know that even if a health problem tends to run in our family, we can make healthy choices to lower our chance of getting it.

### **2. Talk about risk factors**

Family health history is more than just genetics. Many families also share their lifestyles, habits and environment. These risk factors may affect your tendency to develop a health problem. Keep in mind that your family members may know that they or other members of the family have a health problem. But they

may not know that this means other family members could have an increased risk of getting the problem too. They may also not know that other risk factors affect the tendency to develop the problem. What do your family members know about these risk factors?

What health problems tend to run in our family?

What do we know about risk factors that may increase the chance to develop these chronic health problems?

Give family members a chance to offer ideas. You're likely to get a variety of answers. But some of the most common risk factors for getting chronic health problems are: diet, weight, exercise habits, smoking, and not following screening guidelines. Having a close family member with the problem can also be a risk factor.

Smoking, eating an unhealthy diet, being overweight, and not getting enough exercise are some of the most common risk factors of chronic health problems. A family history also increases a person's chance of getting the problem.

But the good news is, even if you have a family history of a health problem, you can lower your chance of getting it. Eating a healthy diet, exercising, maintaining a healthy weight, and not smoking are ways that we can each stay healthy.

You can't change your genes but in many cases, simply making healthy choices can reduce your tendency for health problems that run in your family.



### 3. Talk about how to collect a family health history

Once you've told your family members why you want to know more about your family health history, you're ready to collect one. Remind your family that this will be useful for not only themselves but children and grandchildren as well.

To get started, ask your family members to tell you a story about one of your family members, maybe a grandparent. Ask about where they worked and lived or what they looked like – anything to get your family talking. Then ask if your family member had any health problems. Use the [10 Questions to Ask Your Family at Thanksgiving](#) fact sheet to guide your questions.

To get a free Family Health History Toolkit or Health Family Tree to collect your family health history visit [www.health.utah.gov/genomic](http://www.health.utah.gov/genomic) or call the Health Resource Line at 1-888-222-2542.

#### 4. Talk about what to do if you are worried about your risk

So, what do you do if you are worried about your family health history? Talk to your doctor. Your doctor can help you understand your risk for a health problem, based on your family health history and other risk factors you may have. Your doctor can also give you recommendations about lifestyle choices and screening tests that can detect problems early and lower your chances of having a problem.

A family may have a high risk to develop a health problem because several of the family members developed the problem at a younger age. These families may want to talk with a genetic counselor or other specialist to learn what they can do to prevent or delay disease. Genetic testing may be helpful in some cases. But even for families with an increased risk to develop a problem, steps can be taken to lower the chance of getting the health problem.

#### 5. Ask family members to look out for each other

Here are two ways to follow up with family members who may have a tendency to develop a health problem based on your family health history.

- If your family is one that talks openly about their health, you may already know which members of your family have a health problem. Make a list of these family members and ask for their contact information. Give them a follow up call, email, letter, or visit some time over the next three months to talk to them about your family health history. Tell them to talk to their doctor about steps they can take to keep themselves and their loved ones healthy. A friendly reminder gives you and other family members a chance to learn more about your family health history and talk about ways you can stay healthy.
- Have family members pick a “family health buddy” that they feel comfortable talking with. Ask family health buddies to follow up with each other at some point over the next three months to talk about what they have learned from their family health history. If your family didn’t know a lot about your family health history, ask health buddies to find out more. The health buddy can also encourage family members to talk to their doctor about what they can do to stay healthy.

#### 6. End the “Turkey Talk”

Thank your family for their help. If you would like to give your family members copies of the toolkit and fact sheets, or to get a free Health Family Tree to collect your family health history, visit [www.health.utah.gov/genomics](http://www.health.utah.gov/genomics) or call the Health Resource Line at 1-888-222-2542.

